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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the state of the art in the area of culturally and linguistically responsive special education as it relates to handicapped linguistic minority students. Seven realities are outlined: (1) the population of linguistically and culturally different children is growing in public schools; (2) most linguistically and culturally different students are receiving inappropriate services in regular education programs; (3) linguistic/cultural minority students in public schools have been erroneously misclassified as students needing or not needing special education services; (4) there are very few school systems that have developed and implemented a comprehensive systematic procedure for evaluating culturally and linguistically different students; (5) school systems desperately need trained bilingual/bicultural educators who represent the target population in order to provide the needed direct services; (6) all educators need professional development in order to be active participants in developing and implementing culturally responsive education; and (7) school systems at a building level need to develop and implement creative models in order to be able to diagnose, prescribe, and deliver culturally responsive educational programs to minority students. (SB)

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by Patricia Medeires Landurand

Culturally Responsive Education: Where Are We, Where Are We Going and How do we get there?

Today I would like to share with you not only certain realities regarding the "State of the Art" in public school programming in bilingual special education, but share my perception of where we are going and explore strategies of how we might get there. However, before I begin to discuss these realities, I would like to clarify and define a few key terms. The term "bilingual special education" is itself confusing and to some extent a misnomer. What we are really talking about when we use this term is special education for linguistically and culturally different children who have special needs beyond cultural and linguistic factors. When we refer to a linguistic minority student we are referring to a student who is a native speaker of a language other than English. Within this general category of linguistic minority student we have students at one end of the continuum who may have no spoken language due to a severe language disorder.

Along this continuum we have a second general category of students who are limited English Proficient. These students would fall under "Lau" category A, B, and possible C when both languages are considerably below grade level. Within this category of students in public schools who are limited English Proficient, I have observed students, who were placed in special education programs because of their difficulty to master English as well as their own language. A second group of linguistic minority students are having difficulty mastering ESL or simply need more time to grasp the language but these students have no difficulty mastering their own language. A third group within this (LEP) category are displaying no language difficulty but have been identified as having other "handicapping" conditions or as I prefer to say "special needs." These students may be emotionally, physically, or perceptually disabled.

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A third general category of linguistic minority students with special needs are called bilingual students. Many of these students have been found to be needing special services in areas other than language.

Most of these students within each of these three categories that I have defined (Language Disabled, LEP & bilingual) have and are undergoing devastating experiences in public school settings because they are victims of certain realities regarding the state of the art in the area of culturally and linguistically responsive special education.

What are these realities?

1. The first reality is that the population of linguistically and culturally different children is growing in public schools

Today the U.S. has a total of more than 10½ million people of Spanish language background. In New York City alone approximately 25% of all its school age children are Puerto Rican.

Massachusetts, with a relatively small population in less than a decade has doubled its linguistic minority population. Massachusetts now has more than 40,000 linguistic minority students enrolled in its public schools and representing more than 40 different language groups.

2. A second reality is that most linguistically and culturally different students are receiving inappropriate services in regular education programs

Illiteracy, high rates of retention, truancy, and increasing dropout rates among minority students continue.

Of the 18,000 students classified as limited English proficient, only a portion receive services of a bilingual program. If a student of limited English proficiency resides in a community in Massachusetts where there are less than twenty limited English proficiency students of that same language group, that particular school system, according to the Massachusetts Transitional Bilingual Education Act, does not have to implement a bilingual program in that language.

On the other hand, in communities where a complete bilingual program does exist, some parents, preferring the immersion model, select not to have their children participate in the transitional bilingual education program. Of the students in TBE programs, many programs are not receiving local community programming support and therefore are not able to be implemented successfully. Therefore, for various reasons, many linguistic minority students have serious language needs that are not being addressed, despite the legal protections guaranteed those students by state and federal mandates.

3. A third reality is that linguistic/cultural minority students in public schools have been erroneously misclassified as students needing or not needing special education services.

This issue of misclassification of minority students as "handicapped" has resulted in numerous court cases involving linguistic minorities. In the Larry P. vs. Riles decision, the State of California was prohibited from using intelligence tests for the identification of black educable mentally retarded youngsters. A second case, Diana vs. State of California, involved misclassification of Mexican American and Chinese speaking children in classes for the mentally retarded. The judgement of the court was that these linguistic minority children, placed in classes for mentally retarded, must be retested in their primary language. In summary, within the last decade, the judicial system of government has taken the greatest lead in protecting the rights of linguistic minority students in school systems throughout the country.

Statistically, the state of Massachusetts had identified nearly 5% of linguistic minority students in transitional bilingual programs as needing special education services. However, after many of these same students have completed their three years in a transitional bilingual educational program and are then totally integrated in regular monolingual English speaking classes, they are, at that point, often referred for special education if found to be needing of such services.

According to state analyzed statistical data, many local school systems have reported more than 20% of their total Hispanic school population as Hispanic students with special needs. Massachusetts' state incidence figure for special education is 13.5% while the national incidence figure is 12%. It is evident that many linguistic minority students, who have little communication ability in English, are not being identified and referred for special education at a rate equal to their monolingual English speaking peers. On the other hand, linguistic minority students, who have attained some level of English communicative ability and are mainstreamed into regular classes, are disproportionately referred for special education services and are disproportionately placed in special education classes.

There are several implications that can be drawn from this disproportionate enrollment data. Once limited English proficiency students gain some ability to function in English, these students are at high risk of being referred for special education services. At the evaluation stage, many discriminatory practices occur and the linguistic minority student is often misdiagnosed and placed in very restrictive programs.

4. Fourthly there are very few school systems that have developed and implemented a comprehensive systematic procedure for evaluating culturally and linguistically different students.

A review of reasons for teachers' referrals involving linguistic minorities indicated that most referrals were made by teachers who felt the students displayed abnormal behavioral problems and/or serious reading problems. Many of these students with behavioral problems are then placed in restrictive environments for students with behavioral disorders. Other students found to have reading difficulties may or may not be reading in their native language at grade level. Whatever their reading proficiency level may be in their native language, these students, lacking in English literacy skills, are often times referred by the classroom teacher for an evaluation. Prior to and after referral, little, if any modifications of the

regular program are made. Students are not given any support services, such as Title I, tutoring, and English as a Second Language.

Without any modification of the regular program, the student is then given an evaluation where the English language is used as the medium for testing. Because of the linguistic minority student's attainment of basic oral-aural English skills, it is assumed that this student can be evaluated in English. Secondly, the standardized instruments selected by the psychologists are administered to the student. Scores are computed, even though psychologists are aware of the irrelevancy of the norms and the inappropriateness of many of the items to the child's cultural background and experiences. The result is that the student is seriously misclassified.

A second evaluative approach involves a situation where a linguistic minority student, referred for an evaluation, is obviously of limited English proficiency. The school psychologists attempt to evaluate the student with the help of an interpreter. The interpreter is given no training in administering tests. The psychologist is unaware of the accuracy of the interpreted question. The standardized instruments used still contain inappropriate items and still have not been normed on this population. The result of this approach still leads to inaccurate evaluations and misclassification of linguistic minority students.

A third current evaluation practice is to have limited English proficiency students evaluated by bilingual psychologists, who are unfamiliar with the child's cultural background. Other school personnel, unable to speak the student's language, delegate to the bilingual psychologist the total responsibility of evaluating the students and recommending a placement. This practice is very dangerous because the psychologist may be very insensitive to the child's cultural background, and/or may also be a poor assessor. Allowing the bilingual psychologists total authority oftentimes leads to inappropriate placements of students.

A fourth approach involves a sensitive bilingual psychologist, who understands the limited English proficiency student and his culture and understands how to

use evaluation instruments cautiously. He/she relies on a multidisiplinary approach to assessment and gathers relevant information about the child from many sources. The result, in this case, will probably be an accurate assessment of the child's abilities and weaknesses and a proper placement for the child.

Currently, identification procedures of linguistic minority students, who may have special needs, have not been for the most part accurately developed and implemented.

5. A fifth reality is that school systems desperately need trained bilingual/bicultural educators who represent the targeted population in order to provide the needed direct services.

Massachusetts, in May, 1980 had more than 200 job openings in area of "bilingual special education". Some of these positions were filled by qualified bilingual specialists. Many were unfilled because of lack of trained personnel.

To address this personnel need the Bilingual Special Education Project in the Division of Special Education, Massachusetts Department of Education, since September, 1979, has initiated and funded three model bilingual special education graduate programs. Approximately 50 bilingual teachers will receive a license in special education in May, 1981 and will work as licensed bilingual specialists within their community. A third program, is presently underway, and is in the process of recruiting bilingual/and preferably bicultural teachers. All teachers accepted into any of the three model programs have been awarded this opportunity tuition free.

6. A sixth reality is that all educators need professional development in order to be active participants in developing and implementing culturally responsive education.

The Massachusetts Bilingual Special Education Project in the Division of Special Education, Dept. of Education, has conducted statewide training for psychologists in the area of nondiscriminatory assessment of linguistic minority students, for administrators in the area of legal issues and program planning

in minority special education, and for speech therapists in assessing language development of linguistic minority students.

The majority of the training conducted, however, has been focused on bilingual teachers and special educators. Inservice courses such as Methods and Materials in Bilingual Special Education and Understanding Cultural Awareness have been developed and piloted with teachers.

7. The seventh and final major reality is that school systems at a building level need to develop and implement creative models in order to be able to diagnose, prescribe, and deliver culturally responsive educational programs to minority students.

In Massachusetts, we are just beginning to develop and implement models. There are systems in our state that have bilingual generic specialists who serve as consultants, diagnostitions and direct service providers to minority children with special needs. Some systems have bilingual special educators providing direct services to linguistic minority students with special needs in their own language. Some systems have bilingual assessment teams staffed with bilingual psuchologists, school adjustment counselors and bilingual special educators working jointly in assessment, placement, and programming of minority students.

The model I am most excited about and the model I see the most viable is the model that will be discussed in one of the workshops later today by Margie Delgado (Director selected to implement this model). This model was funded for two years by Division of Personnel Training Office of Special Education, and is in its second year of implementation. The model involves training of building teams comprised of a principal, special educator, bilingual educator and two other members involved in servicing minorities. Training in multicultural issues, developing models, and working as teams to address culture and linguistic issues in education is occurring. The participants will function as four system teams, in order to develop models of assessment and service delivery that are appropriate to use in their particular systems.

It was my belief as Director of the Bilingual Special Education Project in Massachusetts and as Associate Director of Multicultural Staff Development Institute at Regis College that we need interdivisional systemwide models with multidisciplinary building teams in order to address the issue of culturally responsive education.

Only when the community and the educators in each school building within the community understand and accept this responsibility to educate every child appropriately will culturally responsive education truly have its beginning. The moral, legal and professional responsibility for educating cultural and linguistic minority children rests with all educators and regardless of the changing political opinions and decisions, let no educator be so naive as to forget their responsiblity or make light of the upward plight of many beautiful people who were raised in a democracy, appreciate that democracy and will help this country reach a cultural democracy where difference is not a deficiency, b.. an avenue of personal and shared growth.